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E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/14/2034

TAGS: PGOV KDEM PTER PK

SUBJECT: SHARIFS REMAIN OPEN TO NEGOTIATION

CLASSIFIED BY: Bryan D. Hunt, Principal Officer, American Consulate Lahore, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: In a March 14 meeting, Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) President Shahbaz Sharif told Principal Officer that he and the US were open to negotiation.

¶2. (S) PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif welcomed efforts by the United States, United Kingdom, and the Pakistan Chief of Army Staff to negotiate.

¶3. (S) Shahbaz Sharif highlighted that the PML-N currently had four core goals in the negotiation process. First, the restoration of the elected government. The Principal Officer raised the possibility of a provincial unity government headed by the minority PML, which Shahbaz rejected.

The former Chief Minister argued that his party had a clear plurality in the provincial assembly, which had been established through an elected assembly.

¶4. (S) On the issue of former Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, Shahbaz claimed that the PML-N was open to negotiation, provided that Chaudhry was removed from office.

¶5. (S) Shahbaz raised that his party also believed any negotiated settlement should include movement towards full adoption of the Charter of the PML-N. Shahbaz indicated that the actual implementation of this part of the agreement could be prolonged, but felt that his party would require, at the very least, a Long March.

¶6. (S) Shahbaz noted that both he and Nawaz Sharif were very concerned about the potential for criminal and/or terrorist elements to exploit the situation.

¶7. (S) Principal Officer asked Shahbaz whether his party was prepared to negotiate the venue for the planned Islamabad sit-in with the federal government. Shahbaz, after consulting with senior leadership of the PML-N, refused to assist. End Note.)

Comment

¶8. (S) As was expected, the Sharifs are expanding the issues on which they want progress as part of negotiations with President Zardari. The US will continue to encourage the Sharifs to focus on the core issues of the PML-N.

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